



File Code: 1950/2400

Date: November 15, 2020

Dear Forest Stakeholder:

This project announcement letter serves to initiate scoping, "an early and open process for determining the scope of issues to be addressed" (40 CFR 1501.7). I request your input on the following proposed action regarding Albert Pike Recreation Area (APRA).

Description of the Proposed Action

The Albert Pike Recreation Area is located on the Little Missouri River near Umpire and Langley in Montgomery County, Arkansas in Section 27, Township 4 South, Range 27 West.

The Ouachita National Forest proposes to make the following changes to the long-term management and use of the APRA:

- Improved day use opportunities including general maintenance, additional parking, alternative bathroom facilities, increased signage and improved swim beach.
- Overnight use below the 100-year flood elevation would not be permitted anywhere in the APRA.

Purpose and Need for the Project

There is a need to determine which uses and facilities will be available to the public at APRA in the future. This "river-side" recreation area became the subject of intense national, regional and local attention when the Little Missouri River overtopped its banks in the very early morning hours of June 11, 2010, generating a flash flood that resulted in 20 deaths in the APRA and undeveloped areas up stream. The surviving family members and many others who were camping in the developed recreation area on June 10-11 also lost vehicles and other personal property in the flood. An asphalt parking lot and connecting lanes, campsites, and bathhouses were heavily damaged, particularly in Loop D but also to some extent in Loop C, which was being reconstructed at the time.

The need for the project arises from the conditions just described: First, there is a need to reconsider appropriate uses and facilities in this recreation area following the loss of lives and property; second, there is a need to reconsider appropriate uses and facilities in the context of "new information," including the devastating nature of the historic flash flood.

Contrasts between the desired conditions described in the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (Plan) for the Ouachita National Forest and those existing on the ground *further* illustrate the need for action, albeit not as vividly. The Plan describes *Desired Conditions for Recreation Participation* as follows:

Recreation participation, activities, and services contribute to visitors' physical and mental well-being and represent a variety of skill levels,



needs, and desires. Quality fish and wildlife habitat and a variety of access opportunities are available to the public. Facilities and infrastructure are high quality, well maintained, safe, accessible, and consistent with visitors' expectations. Primitive recreation opportunities are maintained on at least 70,000 acres, semi-primitive recreation opportunities on at least 136,000 acres, and roaded-natural recreation opportunities on much of the remainder of the National Forest. Existing "rural" recreation opportunities in developed recreation areas are maintained. (p. 22)

The existing condition of APRA is that, while some facilities and infrastructure remain "high quality" and accessible (e.g., the bathhouse in Loop B), others have been removed (Loop C and D campsites) and still others (remaining bathhouses) are deteriorating due to lack of routine maintenance. Camping has not been allowed at APRA since June 11, 2010.

The Plan describes *Desired Conditions for Developed Recreation Areas* as follows:

The landscape will generally be modified but still present a forest-type setting. Little to no evidence of non-recreation resource development will be noticed; however, vegetation management activities may include planting, pruning, cutting, herbicide application (e.g., for, poison ivy control), or hazard-tree removal. Facilities, such as roads, buildings, camping sites and tables, will be evident but compatible with the overall setting of the area. Various levels of human activity and sounds from vehicles and other motorized equipment will be evident. Depending upon the particular location, easy access for activities such as fishing and hiking, swimming, and group events will be available. Visitors will find a moderate level of user restrictions to ensure public health and safety and protection of resource values. (p. 31)

At present (the existing condition), there are many user restrictions, including prohibitions on camping or overnight parking as well as very limited parking and restroom facilities, and there is considerable uncertainty about the future of the recreation area.

Invitation to Participate in Project Planning

Scoping is not limited to a single point in time; we will continue to accept and consider comments until an implementation decision is made. With that said, your comments will be most helpful if they are received early in the process. They will help us identify environmental issues associated with implementation, and alternative ways to meet Forest Plan objectives and desired conditions. Your involvement will enable us to better assess concerns of the public.

Many helpful comments were received at our November 10, 2020 public collaboration workshop. Those comments as well as those provided during this scoping effort will be considered as we move forward with alternative development and analysis.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will become a part of the public record for this proposed action. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, anonymous comments will not provide the Agency with the ability to provide the respondent with subsequent environmental documents

Objection Process

This project is subject to subparts A and B of 36 *CFR Part 218 Project-Level Predecisional Administrative Review Process* (objection process); it is not authorized under the Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA).

The designated opportunity for public comment in response to this solicitation is **November 15, 2020** to **December 15, 2020**. Providing specific written comments during this time will afford you standing to later file an objection to the project, should you desire (see Upcoming Project Planning Steps).

Pursuant to §218.2, specific written comments should be within the scope of the proposed action, have a direct relationship to the proposed action, and must include supporting reasons for the responsible official to consider.

How to Comment

Email is the preferred way to submit specific written comments. Send email comments to comments-southern-ouachita-caddo-womble@fs.fed.us. Comments may also be submitted through the mail to Troy Heithecker, Forest Supervisor, c/o Chip Stokes 1523 Hwy 270 E, Mt. Ida AR 71957 or fax to 870-867-3338. The office hours for those submitting hand delivered comments are 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Please state "Albert Pike Recreation Area" in the subject line when providing electronic comments or on the envelope when replying by mail.

Upcoming Project Planning Steps

As stated above, your comments will help us identify issues and they will be used to formulate alternatives to this proposal. An environmental analysis will be conducted, and the results will be documented in an environmental assessment (EA).

Upon completion, the EA will be released for public review and comment. A 30-day notice and comment period pursuant to 36 CFR 218 will be initiated. This comment period will afford you another opportunity to obtain standing to later file an objection to the project, should you desire.

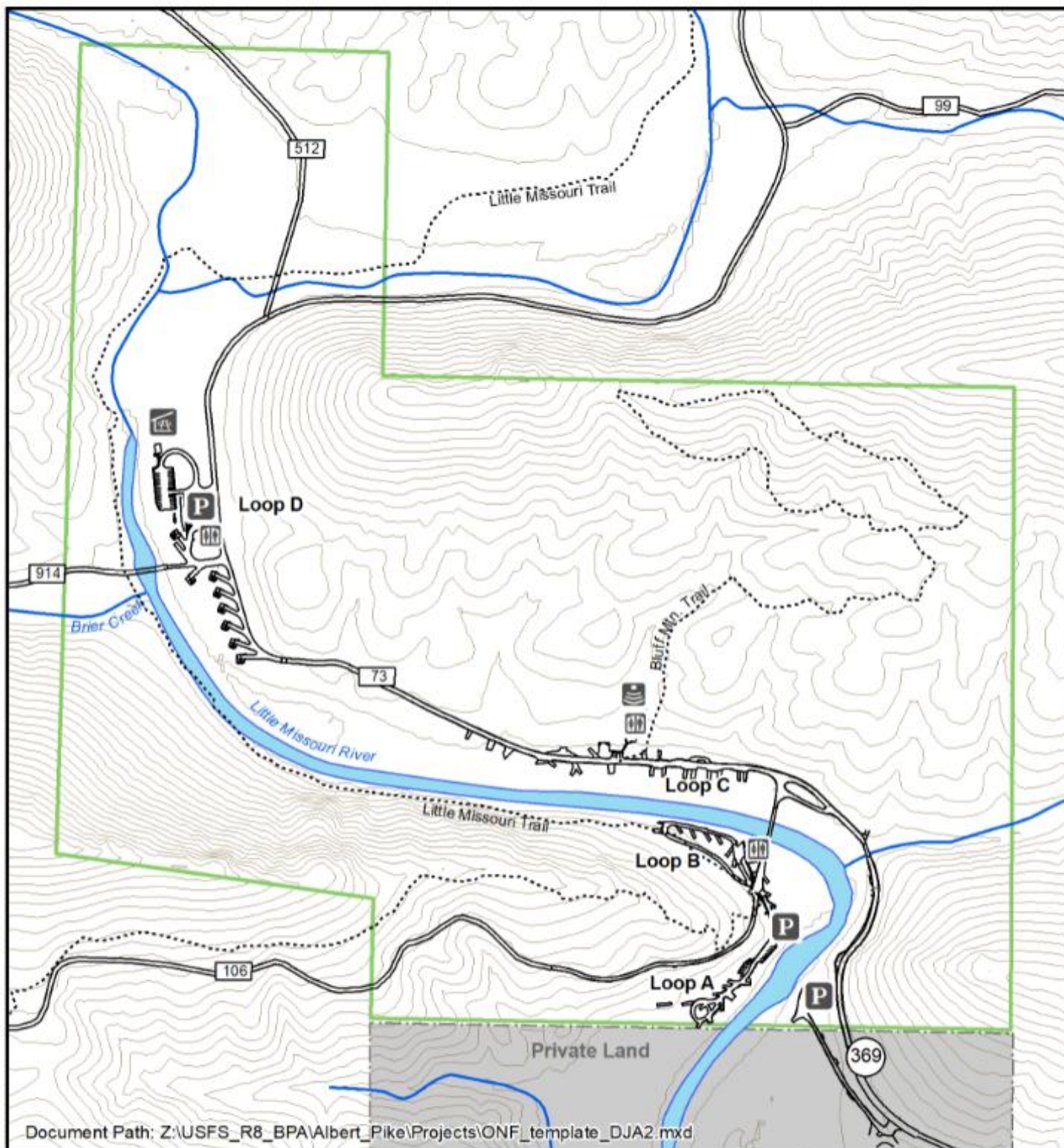
An objection period, if required, will follow the regulation found in §218.7. Issues raised in objections must be based on previously submitted specific written comments regarding the project and attributed to the objector, unless the issue is based on new information that arose after a designated opportunity to comment (§218.8(c)).

Thank you for your continuing interest in the management of your National Forest.

Respectfully,



Troy Heithecker
Forest Supervisor



Vicinity Map
ONF Ranger Districts



The USDA Forest Service makes no warranty, expressed or implied regarding the data displayed on this map, and reserves the right to correct, update, modify, or replace this information without notification.

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Legend

- Albert Pike Recreation Area Boundary
- Restrooms
- Amphitheater
- Parking
- Picnic Pavilion
- 20 Foot Contours

Date Saved: 11/12/2020 9:06:45 AM

Albert Pike Recreation Area

Project Area

Caddo/Womble Ranger District
Montgomery County, Arkansas

U.S. Forest Service - R8
Ouachita National Forest